

Lobby groups

What they want



Group	What they are seeking	What's been rumoured	Recent experience	Who they met	What they say
Irish Congress of Trade Unions 	Annual €3 billion economic stimulus programme for each of the next three years, as well as a series of increased taxes on wealth and unearned income.	A property tax will place further strain on workers at a time when most pay packets are frozen or falling. Unions will have taken note of the fact that a proposal for an additional €1 billion in public sector payroll savings has been approved at Cabinet.	The unions have said salaries have fallen by 0.9 per cent for every 1 per cent drop in gross domestic product and that the scaling back of public services has prevented many young people from getting started in the jobs market, a driver of emigration.	Met Minister for Finance Michael Noonan and officials from his department.	“Domestic demand – central to jobs and living standard – was down by a massive 26 per cent by spring 2012 and it is still falling. Nominal economic growth figures are at 2004 levels. There are few green shoots, regrettably.”
Small Firms Association 	No changes to corporation tax, income tax, capital taxes or indirect taxes such as VAT and excise. A voluntary PRSI rate should be created for the self-employed	Reports that consideration is being given to cutting the State's contribution to sick pay and that levels of employers' PRSI might be changed would be causes for concern.	The cut from 60 per cent to 15 per cent of the State rebate for redundancies has reportedly posed problems for businesses seeking to restructure. Increased taxes and joblessness have hampered consumer sentiment.	Spoke to Minister for Enterprise Richard Bruton, Minister of State for Small Business John Perry, and Minister for Finance Michael Noonan.	“Members throughout the country are frustrated in their efforts to create jobs and recruit staff due to the disincentive created by high social welfare”
Irish Farmers Association 	No further cuts to State funding for the agriculture and forestry sectors. It wants eligibility criteria and the number of places on farm support schemes to be maintained.	Old faithfuls such as raising duties on fuel will be in the reckoning as the Government seeks to raise revenue. The end of stamp duty relief on land transfers to young trained farmers raises issues about farm succession.	The Department of Agriculture budget was cut by 6 per cent in 2012. Funding for State farm schemes has fallen by 40 per cent since the start of the recession, the IFA says.	Met Minister for Agriculture Simon Coveney, Minister for Finance Michael Noonan and Minister for Public Expenditure Brendan Howlin.	“Farming is experiencing a very difficult year in 2012. A combination of dreadful weather conditions, soaring input costs and falling prices in some commodities, is impacting on profitability and output at farm level.”
Irish National Organisation for the Unemployed 	Maintain rent supplement supports at current levels, to introduce “a properly structured” internship programme and a revised back-to-work allowance to help people returning to employment.	Possible cuts to the length for which the non-means-tested jobseeker's benefit is paid, from 12 to nine months, are a cause of concern. As is the prospect of cuts to child benefit, which would place further pressure on families reliant on social transfers.	The group says those it represents have suffered a drop of almost 10 per cent in their incomes in recent budgets as welfare rates have fallen. Changes to medical card and drug payment schemes have also increased healthcare costs for the unemployed.	Discussions were held with Minister for Social Protection Joan Burton at a pre-budget forum and Minister for Public Expenditure Brendan Howlin and Minister for Finance Michael Noonan via the social partnership process.	“It is absolutely critical the Government show their solidarity with unemployed people and stand by the commitment made in the programme for government that ‘we will maintain social welfare rates’.”
Union of Students in Ireland 	No further cuts to student maintenance grants, for the student contribution charge to be kept at €2,250 and for the Government to take steps to reduce graduate unemployment.	The IMF has suggested that further savings could be achieved by examining the way third-level fees are paid by the State. Mooted changes to grant systems, to include means testing of assets such as land, have raised fears among farming families.	The student contribution fee has been repeatedly hiked in recent years and the criteria for qualifying for third-level grants have become tighter. Overall spending on education was cut by some €132 million last year in the Coalition's first budget.	Met Minister for Education Ruairi Quinn and officials from his department ahead of the budget as well as dozens of TDs from both sides of the Dáil at its pre-budget forum in Dublin.	“We need to innovate and pioneer new approaches to the challenges we face as a nation. Our present circumstances demonstrate the fallacy of short-term economic thinking”
Construction Industry Federation 	VAT rate on construction projects to be reduced from 13.5 to 9 per cent to stimulate activity in the sector. It also wants the Government to impose mandatory lending targets on banks for new mortgages to increase activity in the housing market.	Spending on capital projects, which the sector has become increasingly reliant on, is being cut by some €550 million next year. The end of mortgage interest relief raises uncertainty about the level of future property activity. Reports suggest the requested VAT reduction may come to pass.	Mortgage interest relief has been seen as a driver of improved activity in the housing market over the last year but there has been little else to bring cheer to those in the construction sector. Repeated cuts to capital spending, reduced incomes and high unemployment have further reduced the appetite for building work.	Held discussions with Minister for Finance Michael Noonan and Minister for Public Expenditure Brendan Howlin.	“Construction, at its peak in 2007, amounted to €39 billion. By 2011, the size of the sector had fallen to €9 billion, and is projected to fall to €7.5 billion in 2012.”
Disability Federation of Ireland 	The standard of living of people with disabilities must be protected and that disability- specific and personal social services funded by the Health Service Executive merit protection.	An advisory group on tax and social welfare reportedly told Minister for Social Protection Joan Burton that a less valuable domiciliary care allowance could be paid to the parents or guardians of 16 and 17 year olds with disabilities.	The federation says disability welfare payments have been cut by some 8 per cent since 2010 and that the Capital Assistance Scheme, used to house people with disabilities, has been significantly reduced.	Met Minister for Finance Michael Noonan and Minister for Public Expenditure Brendan Howlin as part of the pre-budget social partnership process.	“We cannot content ourselves with having reduced the deficit at the expense of a collapsed social infrastructure”
Age Action Ireland 	Urged the Government to protect and maintain the value of State pensions and to resist cutting payments such as carers' allowance and the respite grant.	In September the IMF said a targeted reduction of State pensions, so far exempted from reductions, should be considered to cut welfare costs. There are suggestions that free travel schemes could be narrowed or altered to include small fees.	Age Action says changes to fuel support payments have had a significant impact on those relying on the State pension. It says reduced home help hours have increased difficulties for older people.	A brief meeting was held with Minister for Social Protection Joan Burton, Minister for Finance Michael Noonan and Minister for Public Expenditure Brendan Howlin as part of the pre-budget social partnership process.	“We ask that decision-makers consider the challenges posed for those ageing in Ireland. Specifically the vulnerability of the private pension industry, the risk of living in poverty, living with a disability and being unable to function independently in the home.”
Society of St Vincent de Paul 	Asked the Government to protect community public health services, maintain supports such as home help and homecare packages and introduce minimum pricing for alcohol.	Suggestions that charges on prescriptions for medical card holders may rise further will be a cause for concern. Changes to the universal social charge and the new property tax could push more workers into poverty.	The society says the most vulnerable in society have been most harshly targeted in recent budgets through an accumulation of cuts to allowances, grants and welfare payments.	Met Minister for Social Protection Joan Burton at a pre-budget forum. A spokesman said a further meeting with the Minister was sought but did not take place.	“Government must tackle the burden of the banking debt, reduce the non-core costs of providing public services and ensure that those who can afford it take more of the burden of the crisis on their shoulders.”